

THE AMERICAN ARMY'S DEBT TO THE INDIAN

His Military Tactics Have Stamped Their Influence Indelibly Upon the Ways of the United States Soldier in the Field. To the Indian, Also, May Be Given Some of the Credit for Khaki Colored Clothing.

By W. O. M'GEEHAN

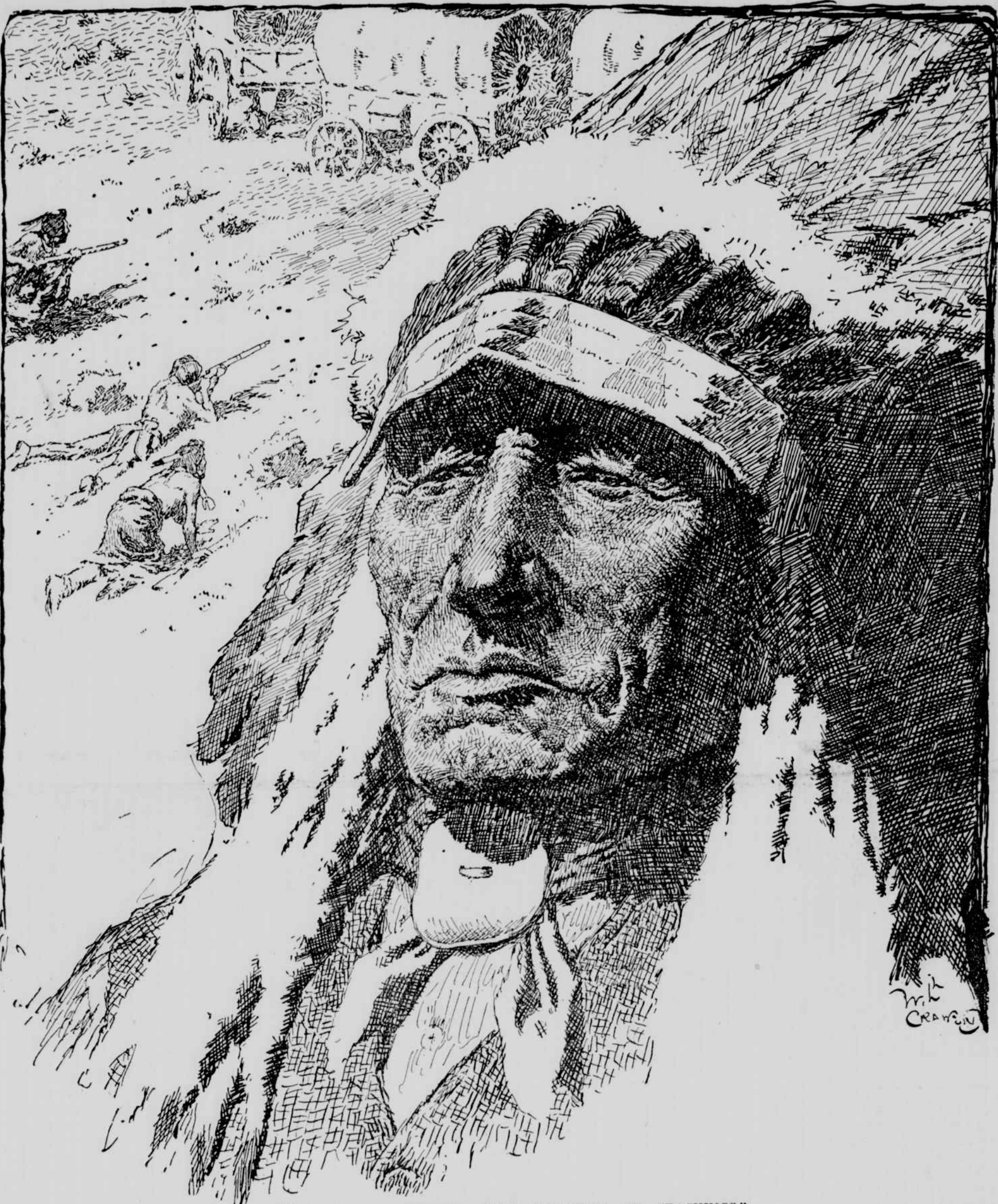
WHO was the greatest American general? Considered from the point of view of his influence upon American field tactics, it was not Washington nor Grant nor Lee. It was some nameless Indian warrior whose bones lie in a forgotten mound and whose shade, sitting erect upon a ghostly steed in the Happy Hunting Grounds, grins sardonically as it looks down upon a brigade of khaki-clad United States troops drilling in open order.

He sees the paleface commander deploying his skirmish lines with wide intervals between the men just as he had done and he notes with grim approval how the infantrymen take advantage of the topography of the country. Then, as he sees the advance by rushes, a squad or platoon darting forward from opposite sides of the line to baffle the fire of the enemy, he knows that field tactics as he designed them were good.

And that is all that the original American has left to the country. His music does not amount to much, his folk lore is not worth the preserving, but his military tactics have stamped their influence indelibly upon the American army. What has happened over in Europe during the last two years may entirely change the field tactics of the United States Army, but at the present writing the principle of open order, borrowed from the original American infantry, the Indian hosts, dominates the American field tactics.

The first of the paleface generals to admit the military genius of the American Indian was George Washington. That was during the French and Indian wars, when Washington was attached to the Braddock expedition. The elementary histories tell how Washington tried to impress the stubborn English commander with the folly of fighting in close formation in that wilderness. Washington suggested that the English expedition adopt the Indian tactics and take advantage of the country. Braddock refused and the refusal to adopt the Indian tactics was disastrous to the expedition.

Military science has turned to the Indian point of view since then. It is a primary rule in the tactics of all nations now to take advantage of the terrain—that is, the topography of the country. If there are trees to mask an advance, every advantage which the cover gives is taken for all that it is worth. It is no longer considered unchivalrous or unmilitary to make feint attacks from the front while the main attack is made in



"THE PALEFACE WARRIORS HAVE MASTERED MY TEACHINGS."

Drawn by Will Crawford.

the flank or in the rear. Any military tribunal of to-day would have cashiered Braddock. He would be regarded as a man utterly ignorant of the first principles of military science.

Perhaps we may not be able to prove that the credit for the khaki-colored clothing which makes the modern soldier such a difficult mark for the enemy rifleman belongs to the American Indian. But the fact remains that the Indian was the first to adopt a fighting costume which made him hard to distinguish against his background. The dun of the deerhide clothing which the American Indian wore was as hard to distinguish as the khaki of the American or British armies or the dull gray of the German army. The white clothing which the

German armies in Russia used for advancing through the snow is an adaptation of the American Indian's scheme of making himself look like his background. The Indian never had any artillery, but he paved the way for the masked batteries.

The incendiary bomb used in Europe was another invention of the American Indian. Long before he knew the use of gunpowder the American Indian used flaming arrows to set fire to fortresses. Andrew Jackson later adopted the scheme when he sent a red hot cannon ball into the renegades' fort in Florida and blew up the powder magazine.

The tactics of the United States Army in the Philippines and in Cuba were entirely the tactics of the American Indian. United States troops charged the Spanish blockhouses in the same fashion as the Indians rushed an immigrant train or a border stockade. These charges baffled the Spaniards and they disgusted the Filipinos, who always protested that the American troops fought unfairly.

I saw one strongly defended town in the Philippines rushed Indian fashion by two companies of volunteer infantry and captured in a frontal attack with heavy loss to the Filipinos. The latter were

strongly intrenched and their Mauser rifles swept the open ricefields through which the American troops had to advance.

The United States troops deployed into line of skirmishers just beyond the range of direct fire. Then they started to advance by rushes according to the plans made by some ancient Indian commander. One squad would dart forward for fifty or a hundred yards and start firing from behind one of the little hummocks which criss-crossed the field while the line behind continued a steady fire on the Filipino trenches. Just as this squad was settling to pour a steady fire at the Filipinos another would dart forward from a different part of the line. The fire of the Filipino lines became demoralized. There was no stationary target and all the time the American fire drew closer and became more accurate.

It took less than three hours to take this strongly defended place by frontal attack and with a ridiculously small force. General Charles King, who had charge of this attack upon Santa Ana on the south line near Manila, acknowledged that it was won by Indian fighting, pure and simple.

One of the Filipino generals—Pio Del

Pilar, I think—afterward complained that it was unfair. "They attacked us in a different manner from the Spanish troops," he said. "And they were into our trenches before we knew it. We were shooting all the time, but there was nothing to shoot at. When we started to fire at one group of men they were no longer there and men were running forward from another part of the field. When we turned our rifles there were men coming at us from another direction. We had barely time to leave our trenches before the American soldiers jumped into them."

This advance by rushes is an essential part of the American field tactics of the present. It was plagiarized directly from an Indian rush upon an immigrant

The Advance by Rushes, an Essential Part of Present-Day Army Tactics, Is a Direct Descendant of the Indian Rush Upon Immigrant Train or Frontier Stockade. Villa of Mexico Inherited an Idea or Two from His Indian Ancestors.

train or a frontier stockade. It is the only style of frontal attack that would in any way embarrass machine gun operators.

General Villa used it in his operations against the Huerta army, and an editor who is in the habit of making remarkably original discoveries decided that Villa had worked the plan out all by himself. Villa's ancestors had been advancing by rushes in frontal attacks hundreds of years before, and as a matter of fact at the time Villa was using this plan of attack it was part of the United States Army tactics. Villa's men captured many a machine gun in this manner.

It was the American Indian, too, who first discovered that the cavalryman's horse was chiefly useful for getting him somewhere in a hurry and that once the cavalryman was at his destination he was more effective fighting as an infantryman. Were it not for his penchant for scalping those slain in battle and for some other eccentricities the Indian would be frankly acknowledged as the greatest cavalryman and the originator of most of the cavalry tactics of the United States Army. Setting aside all prejudice and gauging his work purely from the point of view of efficiency with the smallest numbers and the least facilities, Geronimo, the Apache, was perhaps the greatest of all cavalry commanders. Certainly, he attacked with the greatest dash and inflicted the maximum harassment with the minimum effort, which is the business of the cavalry commander.

Should the American army be forced to invade Mexico, it will be a case of the purely American tactics as demonstrated by United States troops as against the purely American tactics as demonstrated by the Mexicans, half brothers of the originators of those tactics. Other things being equal, such as the matter of guns and munitions, the victors will be those who have become most proficient in the tactics of the ancient and purely American general who first evolved the scheme of open order and advance by rushes.

One can almost see the inventor of those tactics watching the struggle from his vantage point on a peak in the Happy Hunting Grounds. The ghostly war bonnet is proudly erect and there is a brilliant light in the fierce dark eyes of the great warrior.

"My brothers use my battle plans well," he says, "but the paleface warriors have mastered my teachings even better. They are great warriors now, the palefaces, for they fight with the cunning that I have taught and in the real American fashion."

And the heart of the great chief will no longer be bitter as he turns to his wigwam. The tactics of the United States Army form a flattering tribute to the American Indian's only streak of genius, the genius for military affairs.

